

# Is Our World Cultural Heritage Worth Saving? Activists Call Out Saudi Arabia on the Disappearing of History

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*"A concerted effort to preserve our heritage is a vital link to our cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, and economic legacies – all of the things that quite literally make us who we are." – Steve Berry*

Over the centuries, militant groups and radical regimes have targeted not just innocent lives but also historic and cultural artifacts preserved and revered by their victims.

And yet, for a lack of political will, or worse still, cultural ethnocentric blindness, we have mostly allowed for our world cultural heritage to sit at the mercy of tomb-raiders, and intolerant fundamentalists, caring little for the depletion of our intellectual wealth.

There is great tragedy in the losses of our cultural memory as every stone, every written line, and every expression of one's beliefs remain a consecrated declaration of our humanity. To abandon our memories to the fires of intolerance is to normalise ignorance as an enactment of political power.

It boggles the mind to think that having come so far in the assertion of our rights we still fail to grasp how intrinsically essential our rights to our collective religious and cultural history are, and how much they stand a testimony to our intellectual evolution.

Again ... to disappear but a fragment of our history is an affront to humanity as a whole.

But since stones and relics do not so easily upset our sensitivities as they fall before the ire of zealots, idleness has emboldened cultural tyrants to the sum of a veritable cultural genocide.

Thomas Campbell, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City put it perfectly when as he decried radicals' cultural ransacking in Iraq:

*"This mindless attack on great art, on history, and on human understanding constitutes a tragic assault not only on the Mosul Museum, but on our universal commitment to use art to unite people and promote human understanding."*

None more than Saudi Arabia have contributed to the systematic obliteration, redacting, and

negation of such wealthy legacy. By the virtue of geography, and political reach the kingdom sits over the cradle of civilisation and monotheism ... axe at the ready should cultural pluralism upset its taste for intellectual uniformity.

The very country who fretted only but a little over the death of [school children](#) by its warplanes in Yemen earlier this August, has had decades and centuries of practice in the sentencing of our past.

To argue ignorance or disinterest can no longer stand a reasonable argument if we consider that religious radicalism – in its most violent expression, seeks first to assert itself by disappearing that which stands in opposition to its vindictive truth.

I would like to think that our streets have witnessed too much of such fundamentalism for any of us NOT to look beyond the infection to seek the rotten core.

The first expression of Terror is in one's rejection of others' history, others' beliefs, others' cultural markers, and others' traditions. We are who we are because others were before us.

I realise that before our current political reality and more to the point nations' needs to form alliances to assert influence and economic continuity pragmatism has demanded that we all be made to look away before cultural barbarism, but how long before History becomes an endangered species ... so to speak?

How much more of the Middle East must we see swallowed, and communities' cultural identities levelled before our voices rise in defense of the innocent? Because truly, no people deserve to witness the fall of their culture and traditions.

Saudi Arabia's propensity to waste that which opposes its reactionary and intransigent interpretations of the Scriptures was first deplored by [Alois Musil](#), a 19th century Czech-Austrian academic, explorer and author.

In his book: *Al Saud*, Musil recalls a frightful event, that for reason we have yet to come to terms with failed to rise but an eyebrow among nations – least of all Muslim nations: the destruction of Islam's sacrosanct Blackstone.

The Blackstone which is believed by some to have been brought down from the Heavens by Angel Gabriel, is centrestage to the Hajj pilgrimage, as every pilgrim must begin circumambulating the Kaaba, from its exact location.

Today only fragments remain of a relic cherished by over a billion men and women across the world.

This is not the only affront Al Saud carried out against the very faith it says to hold custodianship over, and Islam only sits one victim among many of such broad intolerance.

From the [ransacking](#) of the Prophet Muhammad's last resting place, to the destruction of [Al Bagee cemetery](#) in Madina, to the destruction of temples, churches, holy relics predating Islam, the once colourful and buoyant history of the Hijaz (now known as Saudi Arabia), and to a greater extent the Middle East, has been reduced to a dying flicker.

If not for the efforts of the [Al Bagee organization](#) in the United States, which task has been to tirelessly call for the protection of our world religious heritage, I doubt any voice would

have risen in opposition to such terrible crimes, nevermind speaking them to the public.

Religious and cultural pluralism are on death row ... now would be a good time to call for accountability. That is of course we are serious about our human rights.

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